

## **Peoria's Economy and the Newspaper that Shaped It**

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As Napoleon Bonaparte said, "Four hostile newspapers are to be feared more than a thousand bayonets." It is underestimated what four newspapers can do. The tri-county area around Peoria has several newspapers, such as the *Pekin Daily Times*, but the *Journal Star* is Peoria's only daily newspaper. Four newspapers, the *Peoria Journal*, *Herald*, *Star* and *Transcript*, all merged into the *Journal Star*, serving 115,000 people. However, before 1834, with no papers published in Peoria, the village had 500 inhabitants and was a trading center for the region. The city of Peoria and its economy developed as their newspaper industry evolved; as a result, more publishers spend their capital for a successful newspaper.

Henry Pindell and Andrew Bell founded the *Peoria Herald* shortly after Pindell moved to Peoria in 1889. Previously, Pindell worked on the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Springfield Register*. Pindell had also been the editor and chief of the *Wabash Times*. Soon after founding it, Pindell became the lone publisher and owner of the *Peoria Herald*. A year after the *Peoria Star* formed, Pindell bought the *Transcript* and consolidated it with his *Herald*, into the *Herald-Transcript*. The success of the *Peoria Journal*, *Herald*, and *Transcript* was largely due to Pindell's influence with the newspapers. In 1904, Pindell sold the *Herald-Transcript* to a non-local syndicate. The syndicate was Francis Sission of New York City and Charles May of Galesburg. However, Pindell repurchased the *Herald-Transcript* in 1916. Pindell and Eugene Baldwin, founder of the *Journal* and the *Star*, were rivals. Even their approach to

journalism differed. Pindell encouraged writers to work to their full potential. Baldwin was a very skilled writer who knew what readers wanted to read. Their papers also competed, especially in politics. For instance, Pindell and his paper were Democratic, while Baldwin and his newspaper was Republican. The *Journal* was founded after N.C. Nasan and William Rousenville founded the *Peoria Transcript*. Nasan depicted himself as a “practical printer” and a Universalist minister. *Transcript* publication dates go back to 1855, the oldest *Journal Star* ancestor. Although the *Transcript* is the oldest, during the forty years of its publication it traded hands nine times.

J. Barnes and Baldwin established the *Peoria Journal*; publications dates go to December 3, 1877. The *Journal* was printed in the Grand Opera House until destroyed by a fire in 1909. When Baldwin decided to leave the *Journal*, he sold it to Henry Pindell, former city treasurer of Springfield, Illinois, and founder of the *Herald*. In 1916, Pindell began to publish the *Journal* in the afternoon and the *Transcript* in the morning. Later, Baldwin returned to Peoria to found the *Peoria Star* with Charles Powell in 1897. The *Star* was the second evening paper and was independent in politics, unlike many at the time. Also unusual, the *Star* was published everyday, including Sundays. Early in its career, the *Star* was one of the most circulated newspapers outside of Chicago. Baldwin was to his death the manager/editor of the *Peoria Star*. Baldwin died on November 14, 1914. Then the *Journal* and the *Transcript* took over most of the limelight, which merged into the *Journal-Transcript*. It was favored because of the two editions a day, which advertisers took advantage of. In 1924 Henry Pindell died, leaving his son-in-law Carl Slane with the *Peoria Journal Transcript*.

The rise in the price of newsprint and ink in World War II caused difficulties for newspapers. This was unfortunate for *The Star* because it had prior financial trouble. The *Journal Transcript* had plenty of paper in storage; however, it did not have enough presses. The *Star* and *Journal* were still rivals, but both were hurting. Prices began to increase as sales decreased. A somewhat successful solution was the creation of *Peoria's Newspapers, Inc.* Founded in 1944, it handled the business affairs of the newspapers, including the advertising, circulation and production matters. During the ten years of P.N. Inc., the *Star* became the morning paper and the *Journal-Transcript* an afternoon paper. The two remained competitive and separate. But, *Peoria Newspapers, Inc.* could not succeed for long. To keep pace with growing community, new investments and a single owner was needed. In 1954 the two newspapers merged into the *Peoria Journal Star, Inc.*

Henry Slane was the grandson of newspaper industrialist Henry Pindell and the son of Carl Slane. He was chairman of the board and chief executive of the *Peoria Journal Star* after his father. In 1955, 100 years after the founding of *Peoria Transcript*, the *Peoria Journal Star* moved into its current headquarters, near the McCluggage Bridge. The first edition was printed there on November 14, 1955. In 1958, the *Journal Star* suffered through a two-week strike, almost shutting the paper down. In 1922, the *Journal Star* became a morning newspaper. The paper has also been put up for sale; the employee ownership program initiated by H.P. Slane failed, causing financial trouble. It was then put on the market. *Copley Press, Inc.* purchased the *Peoria Journal Star* for \$174.4 million in 1996. The purchase ended thirteen years of employee ownership and 141 years of local ownership.

In conclusion, the city of Peoria and its economy grew and developed as their newspaper industry evolved; more publishers spent their capital for a successful newspaper. The *Journal Star* has a great impact on the tri-county area; it is the only daily newspaper within the region. But before Peoria's first newspaper, Peoria was a small village of about 500, as of yet unfazed by modern newspaper industries like the Peoria *Journal Star* and its patrons, the *Peoria Herald*, *Transcript*, *Journal* and *Star*. Napoleon did, indeed, appreciate how important newspapers could be. [From History of Illinois Press Association, *Illinois Newspapers*; *the Journal Star*, Sept. 23, 1991 and Aug. 1, 1999; Jerry Klein, *Peoria!*; and Odillon B. Slane, *Reminiscences of Early Peoria*.]